

SPORTS AND RECREATION

Nature's Benefits: Promoting Outdoor Activity in Children

By Annie Hermansen-Báez
US Forest Service –
Southern Research Station

I walk up to the shores of Lake Alice and crouch down to take a better look at the small fish darting to and fro at the water's edge. A friendly pink dragonfly zooms around my head as if to say "Welcome to my world, come relax and enjoy!" So I do. I take in everything – the leaves falling from the trees on to the water's surface, sending ripples in every direction; the clouds meandering overhead, the gentle breeze tickling my face and creating a soft rustle of leaves in the nearby trees. "This is nice and peaceful," I think to myself. Then from across the lake the sound of the voices of children, excited and full of wonder, reaches my ears and brings me back to the present. The sound brings a broad smile to my face. I can see the children running up to the water's edge, voices raised in awe at the presence of a nearby alligator. This experience reminds me of all that nature has to offer both children and adults alike. There are so many benefits that we receive from nature, yet we are becoming more and more disconnected from our natural surroundings. Children spend 50 percent less time outdoors than they did 20 years ago, due to factors such as increased television, video game, and computer use; demanding schoolwork and extracurricular schedules; and diminished opportunities for children to play outside unsupervised. Children 8 to 18 years of age spend an average of 7.5 hours per day on all forms of e-media (television, Internet, video games, cell phones)¹, leaving little time for outdoor exploration and exercise. Richard Louv, author of the book



Last Child in the Woods, coined the phrase "nature-deficit disorder" to describe this ever-growing disconnect between children and the natural world. Many pediatricians across the country are now prescribing na-

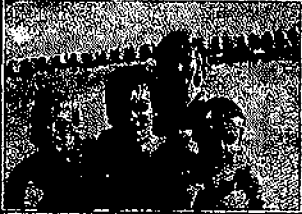
ture to treat a range of health problems, from heart disease to attention deficit disorder. They have taken notice of research that has shown the following key benefits when children spend more time outdoors:

- Reduced stress
- Increased ability to stay more focused
- Enhanced emotional and social development
- Improved school performance
- Enhanced creativity, problem-solving ability, self-esteem, and

Swim America OF GAINESVILLE


YEAR ROUND PROGRAMS:

- Learn to Swim
- Competitive Swim Team
- Adult Masters Team




"GIVE YOUR CHILD A LESSON FOR LIFE."


Passion and Excellence One stroke at a time



Kathleen Troy
Owner/Director
352-390-9191



Jill Wilby
Owner/Director
352-315-0518



Bryan Woodward
Head Coach

Gator Swim Club

Phone 352-373-4583 ext 4585
Fax 352-374-8727

Information for all programs at
www.gatorswimclub.com

SPORTS AND RECREATION

self-control

- Increased appreciation for the environment
- Increased opportunities for parents to engage fully with their children; and
- Improved health by helping to prevent and treat problems such as attention deficit disorder, obesity, heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.

In addition many natural resource organizations are developing campaigns to encourage more children to get outdoors. The U.S. Forest Service and the Ad Council have joined forces to develop the **Unplug and Discover the Forest** campaigns to encourage families to unplug their televisions and electronics and take themselves and their children outside to reconnect with nature and become closer as a family by sharing in healthy activities. The **National Wildlife Federation's Be Out There** campaign aims to make sure that every child gets a daily "Green Hour" - 60 minutes (no matter how it is configured) of exposure to active outdoor play and nature.

Here in Gainesville we are lucky to have an abundance of parks and green spaces within and in close proximity to our city, making it easy to get outdoors and enjoy nature.

Within just a 10-minute walk from my house I can be at Westside Park or Loblolly Woods Nature Park. Lake Alice, where I enjoyed the company of fish, dragonflies, and alligators.

As I think about all this, the pink dragonfly comes back and zooms around me again, bringing me back to why I first came to the water's edge. The sheer wonder and allure of nature! Get out and experience nature today. You'll be glad you did!

Some of the great places to get outdoors in Gainesville include:

- Cofrin Nature Park
- Devil's Millhopper Geological State Park
- Dudley Farm Historic State Park
- Loblolly Woods Nature Park
- Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park
- Morningside Nature Center
- Northeast Park
- Payne's Prairie Preserve State Park
- San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park
- Westside Park

To locate and find out information about these parks, as well as additional local, state and



federal public lands to get outdoors and suggestions for outdoor activities visit www.discovertheforest.org (www.descubreelbosque.org en Español).

To learn more about the benefits of outdoor recreation for kids; programs and initiatives that strive to get more kids outdoors; organizations that promote outdoor recreation and nature exploration for children; or to request **Unplug** materials contact Annie Hermansen-Báez, US Forest Service-Southern Research Station, 352-376-3271, ahermansen@fs.fed.us or visit www.interfacesouth.org/projects/kids-in-the-woods
I. Rideout VJ, Foehr UG, Roberts DF. Generation of M2 Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year Olds. A Kaiser Family Foundation Study: 2001.

Holiday Horse Camp



Dec. 19-23 & Dec. 26-30
9am-5pm

New Year's Eve Overnight
Dec. 31, 4pm-2pm

5 minutes from Gainesville Airport

7624 NE 62nd Drive

Gainesville FL 32609

352-222-3266

www.horsebacklessons.com